



# The Centre meal

Something of grace about the meal  
something electric forging the dull elements  
into a new and hushed  
and human vibrancy -  
a making.

The food is fresh-made, just here,  
each choice of menu a matter of urgency  
personal risk and heated debate  
resolved in meetings weeks in advance.

The tables are round  
of plain deal  
but five years on  
still surprisingly smart.

They like the tables.  
They remember earlier times :  
“We used to eat on trays  
all around the two rooms  
and we had to queue quietly  
in a long line.  
No-one questioned it.  
Who were *we* to complain ?”

The two cooks get a tenner  
and a free meal.  
There is a stringent job description  
so the money's hard earned.

They sit apart  
once the meal is served  
eating with their morning's worker.  
The morning's sweat  
drying on three foreheads  
seals their fellowship.

And they come, the people,  
from all their far edges  
from all their fastnesses  
to sit here at the plain deal  
eight per table  
forming the circle.

They come with their famishment  
no food can satisfy  
with their lostness  
no finding here can heal.

The limitation of the event  
with its essentialness ;  
the simplicity of the being together  
in these plain circles  
with the distance each has travelled  
to get here ;  
simply the eating  
makes a new sense here  
a true valuing.

No-one would dare  
say grace here  
but grace is present  
in all the racket of the business  
of eating, the clatter, the voices'  
rise and fall ;  
in every movement  
of fork to lips, of eye to eye ;  
in every word that is spoken ;  
in every moment the circles  
remain unbroken.

From what forsaken places  
are we gathered here, today.

*Rogan Wolf*

*The meal described here took place in a community centre for people with long term mental health problems.*